

## **State ATC arrests East Baton Rouge Parish ABC board member on Extortion and Public Bribery charges**

Louisiana Office of Alcohol and Control Commissioner Troy Hebert announced today that his office had made an arrest of a city parish official for Extortion and Public Bribery. Ralpheal Steven Johnson, a member of the East Baton Rouge ABC Board has been arrested by state ATC Agents on felony arrest warrants.

The warrants allege that Johnson, who was appointed to a four-year term as a board member by the metro council, threatened to oppose the issuance of a permit and then accepted a monetary bribe not to oppose the matter. Johnson is also listed as Vice President and executive director of the Melrose East Community Association Inc. (MECA). The warrant further alleges that Johnson, as a board member and MECA Vice President, opposed the issuance of a license, but made an agreement to drop all opposition if a lump sum contribution of \$1500.00 and monthly payments of \$150 were made to MECA. The license applicant made the payment in the form of a check in order to stop the opposition.

City Parish ABC Director Chris Cranford became aware of the situation and recognized that the activities were suspicious. Since Johnson was an appointed member of the City Parish ABC Board, Cranford referred the matter to the State ATC for investigation. Hebert said that his office conducted an investigation, which included video recordings of the meeting where Johnson received the \$1500 from the license applicant.

“This type of activity undermines the entire permitting process. I commend the local ABC authorities for working with ATC to ensure that we maintain integrity and confidence in issuing permits to sell alcohol & tobacco in Louisiana.” Commissioner Hebert said.

For further information contact:

Commissioner Troy Hebert